Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, October 2003

Report of Provincial Results

Highlights

April 2004

EQAO
Education Quality and Accountability Office

104-05642/

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), October 2003 Highlights

Background

As recommended by the Royal Commission on Learning, the OSSLT was introduced to provide greater confidence in the literacy skills of students graduating with a high school diploma.

For the purpose of the OSSLT, literacy is defined as having the reading and writing skills required to understand reading selections and to communicate through written forms as expected in *The Ontario Curriculum* in all subjects, up to the end of Grade 9.

The OSSLT is administered at each publicly funded Ontario secondary school in Grade 10 to provide information on students' attainment of literacy skills.

Where students have not demonstrated the required reading and writing skills, the OSSLT provides an alert to parents, students and teachers that interventions should be provided and that improvement is needed to ensure the students meet the fundamental reading and writing skills required for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

Assessments for Learning: Using Data for Improvement

The goal of EQAO's assessments is to ensure greater accountability and to contribute to the enhancement of the quality of education in Ontario. This is done through assessments that gather objective, reliable and relevant information, and through the public release of that information along with recommendations for system improvement.

The OSSLT measures student performance and contributes to educational improvement by

- ensuring that students have acquired the reading and writing skills they are expected to have learned by the end of Grade 9. These skills are outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum.*
- providing student achievement information, beyond regular in-school testing and classroom observation, that can support decision making and leverage improvements for students.
- encouraging parent–teacher and school–community dialogue, so that successful strategies can be identified and implemented.
- providing contextual information that allows teachers, parents and the community to interpret results in a constructive and responsible manner.

Good assessment is a key ingredient in improved student performance; students, parents and teachers need informative, reliable feedback to measure learning outcomes. High-quality assessment is integral to improving student performance.

–Donna Wishart, Literacy Coordinator and Head of the English Department, John L. Forster Secondary School, Greater Essex County District School Board

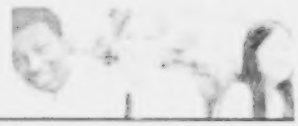
The Role of Literacy

Many studies point to the relationship between literacy skills and a student's future success, suggesting that the better developed a student's literacy skills, the better his or her chance to achieve success beyond his or her scholastic career.

- The Canadian Council on Social Development published Still Struggling: An Update on Teenagers at Work, which states that students are staying in school longer because they recognize they need a good education to get a good job.
- Statistics Canada's report *Youth in Transition Survey* found that a lower literacy score in reading was a factor associated with 15-year-olds' leaving school within two years. The report indicates that young people who do not finish high school have lower levels of self-esteem and less confidence in their ability to achieve.
- A report by Human Resources Development Canada, *The Costs of Dropping Out of High School*, found that students with lower literacy levels are at greater risk of failing to integrate into the labour market.
- The Royal Commission on Learning identified reading, writing and communicating as essential tools for learning and called for a universal literacy test that would be a literacy guarantee and "a promise to the public that any high school graduate in Ontario can read and understand, and can write and convey information."

The OSSLT assesses the reading and writing skills that students are expected to learn in all subjects, to the end of Grade 9.

The following pages highlight the results from the October 2003 administration of the test.

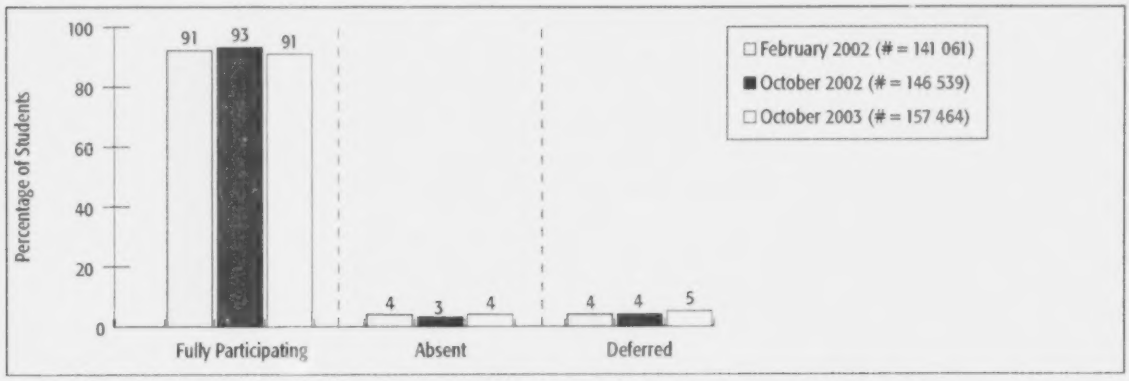


First-Time Eligible Students

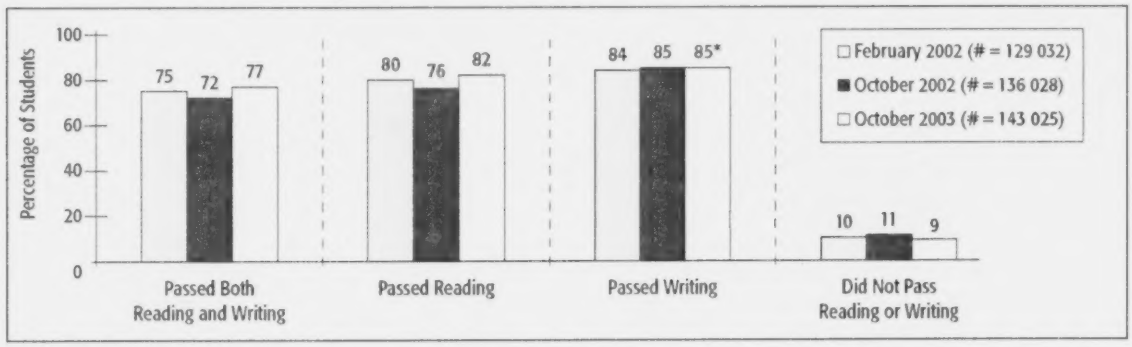
Results at a Glance

- In 2003, 91% of first-time eligible students wrote the OSSLT, a slight decrease from 2002 (93%).
- In 2003, 77% of English-language students passed both the reading and the writing components, while 14% passed one component.
- There has been a 5% increase over last year in the percentage of English-language students who successfully completed the OSSLT.

Participation Data



Achievement Results: Participating Students Three-Year Comparison

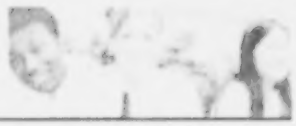


* The 1% difference between this percentage and the combined percentages of those who passed writing only and those who passed both components (from the report tables) is attributable to double rounding effects associated with adding the percentages.

Overall Results by Contextual Factor for Participating Students

Contextual Factor	Number Participating	Passed Both Reading and Writing	Passed Reading	Passed Writing	Did Not Pass Reading or Writing
Gender	Female # = 69 529	80%	84%	89%	7%
	Male # = 71 961	73%	80%	82%	11%
Language	ESL/ELD* # = 4677	42%	45%	69%	28%
	ESL/ELD receiving special provisions # = 3468	43%	46%	70%	27%
Special Needs	Special needs (excluding gifted) # = 17 183	46%	54%	65%	27%
Accommodations	IEP* only # = 3361	50%	58%	69%	23%
	IEP and IPRC* # = 12 021	43%	51%	63%	29%
Program	Academic # = 98 709	90%	93%	94%	2%
	Applied # = 36 545	49%	60%	68%	22%
	Locally developed program # = 3262	18%	26%	38%	55%

* English as a second language and English literacy development (ESL/ELD), Individual Education Plan (IEP), and Individual Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).



Overall Findings for Participating Students

- There has been a 5% increase over last year in the percentage of students who successfully completed the OSSLT.
- A larger percentage of students passed reading in October 2003 (82%) than in October 2002 (76%).
- Students' achievement in writing has remained relatively stable for the three test administrations (84% passed in February 2002, and 85% passed in October 2002 and October 2003).
- As in previous years, a larger percentage of students enrolled in the academic program than in the applied and in locally developed programs successfully completed the OSSLT.
- Overall, more students passed the writing component than the reading component. This trend was also evident among students in the following subgroups: ESL/ELD learners, students enrolled in the applied and in locally developed programs and students with special needs.
- Females generally performed better on the OSSLT than males, especially in writing. In writing, the gender gap was 7%, compared to 4% in reading.

Contextual Information Provided by Schools

- 49% of the participants were female; 50% were male.
- 3% of the participants were identified as ESL/ELD learners.
- 74% of ESL/ELD learners received special provisions.
- Of the ESL/ELD learners who were eligible to write, more than half participated this year. This is a 9% increase over last year's participation rate for ESL/ELD learners.
- 12% of students (excluding gifted) were identified as having an IEP; 9% of students (excluding gifted) had been identified through the IPRC process.
- 90% of students with special needs were provided with accommodations.
- 69% of students were in the academic program, 26% in the applied program, and 2% in a locally developed program.
- 2253 students were exempted.
- 4% were absent one or both days, 5% were deferred and 91% fully participated.

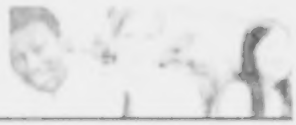
Facts About the Test

- The OSSLT was administered for two and a half hours each morning on October 22 and 23, 2003.
- Successful completion of the OSSLT is one of 32 graduation requirements for students who are part of the cohort that began Grade 9 in September 2000 or later. Students graduating in 2004 must meet this requirement in order to receive their OSSD.
- The OSSLT consists of a reading component and a writing component. In the reading component, students were asked to complete a total of 12 reading selections, divided into three different types (information, graphic and narrative). In the writing component, students were asked to complete four writing tasks (a summary, a series of paragraphs expressing an opinion, a news report and an information paragraph).

- Students with special needs may receive accommodations such as extra time, assistance with pacing, a quiet work place, test items in a different format (e.g., Braille text) or the use of various technological resources (e.g., a voice-activated computer).
- Students who pass one component (either reading or writing) are required to rewrite and pass only the other component in order to meet the diploma requirement.
- EQAO policies and procedures provide for consistent testing across the province.
- In 2003, the Ministry of Education announced the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC), which is an alternative means of meeting this diploma requirement.

Contextual Information Provided by Students

- The majority of students (65%) indicated that they do not read outside school for more than three hours a week. This was also true of writing: the majority of first-time eligible students (73%) reported that they do not write for more than three hours a week. This has been a consistent trend through the years.
- A larger percentage of females than males reported that they read and write outside school for more than three hours a week.
- A larger percentage of males than females reported that they read each of the following most weeks: newspapers, comics and manuals or instructions.
- E-mail messages and chat-room conversations were the types of writing in which the largest percentage of students engaged most weeks.
- A larger percentage of females than males reported that they read each of the following most weeks: Web sites, e-mail or chat messages; magazines; novels, fiction or short stories; poetry or song lyrics; and letters.
- A larger percentage of females than males reported writing each of the following most weeks: letters, journals or diaries; song lyrics or poems; and notes, directions or instructions.
- Electronic communication and popular media were the reading materials that both genders reported they read most weeks.
- A large percentage (97%) of students reported having a computer at home; 31% of students reported using a computer almost every day for school work.
- 24% of students indicated that the first language they learned at home was a language other than English.
- 75% of students indicated that the language they speak most often at home was only or mostly English; 17%, another language (or languages) as often as English; 8%, only or mostly another language.



Previously Eligible Students

Results at a Glance

		Percentage	
	Number	All Previously Eligible Students	Participating Students
Successfully Completed the OSSLT	27 950	50%	61%
Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful	18 145	32%	39%
Number Fully Participating in the OSSLT	46 095	82%	100%
Absent One or Both Days	5 182	9%	
Deferred	785	1%	
Planning to Fulfill Requirement Through OSSLC	3 972	7%	
Total Previously Eligible Students (those working toward an OSSD)	56 034	100%	
Number of Students Exempted	221		

Overall Results by Contextual Factor

Contextual Factor	Number Participating	Successfully Completed the OSSLT	Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful
Gender	Female # = 19 587	63%	37%
	Male # = 26 008	59%	41%
Language	ESL/ELD # = 1927	42%	58%
	ESL/ELD receiving special provisions # = 1330	44%	56%
Special Needs	Special needs (excluding gifted) # = 13 285	48%	52%
Accommodations	IEP only # = 2700	56%	44%
	IEP and IPRC # = 9377	47%	53%

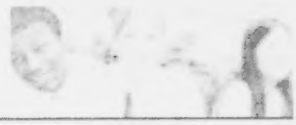
Overall Findings for Participating Students

A larger percentage of students successfully completed the OSSLT than did last year.

- Approximately three out of five previously eligible students successfully completed the OSSLT.
- A larger percentage of students successfully completed the OSSLT than did last year.
- There were higher success rates in writing than in reading. This was also true of ESL/ELD learners and students with special needs. This pattern is similar to that observed among first-time eligible students.
- 7% of this year's previously eligible students were reported as enrolled in the OSSLC. The course was offered for the first time in the 2003–2004 school year.
- Only 3% of ESL/ELD learners were enrolled in the OSSLC, which was a smaller percentage than the other subgroups (6% of students with special needs, 7% of females and 7% of males).
- Of the ESL/ELD learners eligible to write, more than four-fifths participated this year. The participation of ESL/ELD learners increased by 19% from last year.
- Females and males did similarly well in reading, whereas females were more successful than males in writing.

Contextual Information Provided by Schools

- 42% of the participants were female; 56% were male.
- 4% of students were identified as having been in an ESL/ELD program.
- 69% of the ESL/ELD students received special provisions.
- 29% of students (excluding gifted) were identified as having an IEP; 22% of students (excluding gifted) had been identified through the IPRC process.
- 91% of students with special needs were provided with accommodations.
- 221 students were exempted.
- 9% were absent one or both days, 1% were deferred, 7% were planning to fulfill the requirement through the OSSLC, and 82% fully participated.



Contextual Information Provided by Students

- The majority of students (77%) indicated that they do not read outside school for more than three hours a week. This was also true of writing: 77% of students reported that they do not write outside school for more than three hours a week.
- A larger percentage of females than males reported that they read and write outside school for more than three hours a week.
- Electronic communication and popular media were the reading materials that both genders reported they read most weeks.
- A larger percentage of females than males reported that they read each of the following most weeks: magazines; Web sites, e-mail or chat messages; poetry or song lyrics; novels, fiction or short stories; and letters. A larger percentage of males than females reported reading each of the following most weeks: comics and manuals or instructions.
- A larger percentage of females than males reported writing each of the following most weeks: letters, journals or diaries; song lyrics or poems; and notes, directions or instructions.
- E-mail messages and chat-room conversations were the types of writing in which the largest percentage of students engaged most weeks.
- A large percentage (93%) of students reported having a computer at home; 30% of students reported using a computer almost every day for school work.
- 29% of students indicated that the first language they learned at home was a language other than English.
- 68% of students indicated that the language they speak most often at home was only or mostly English; 20%, another language (or languages) as often as English; 11%, only or mostly another language.

Electronic communication and popular media were the reading materials that students most commonly reported reading most weeks.

Overall Recommendations

Assessment is important in education because it provides students, families, educators and policy-makers with information about students' strengths and weaknesses. Everyone should use this information to acknowledge students' strengths, while developing strategies to improve students' learning.

–Linda Henshaw, Grade 10 Teacher, John Fraser Secondary School, Mississauga

EQAO commends the work of the panels of education leaders from across the province who have devoted their expertise to the development of the significant and thoughtful Ontario Ministry of Education publications listed below. EQAO supports and encourages the use of

- *Think Literacy Success, Grades 7–12: The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario* (2003)
- *Building Pathways to Success, Grades 7–12: The Report of the Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group* (2003)
- *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12* (2003)
- *Preparing Students for the OSSLT: Best Practices from Ontario School Boards* (2003)

Another important reference is the *EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning.*

EQAO recognizes that school boards, student-success leaders (at-risk initiatives), school principals and teachers have made literacy instruction a priority. Based on the October 2003 OSSLT achievement results; the patterns and trends emerging from the February 2002, October 2002 and October 2003 administrations of the OSSLT; the data collected from the Student Questionnaires and comments from the educator markers, EQAO recommends that **school boards, student-success leaders (at-risk initiatives), school principals and teachers** continue to do the following:

1. Planning and Using Information
   - Use information to support decision making and to leverage change
   - Gather and analyze data from a variety of sources, including provincial test scores, to set literacy goals and develop improvement plans at the board and school levels
   - Develop, implement and renew systematic kindergarten to Grade 12 improvement plans, especially for students at risk, that span subjects, grades and elementary and secondary panels

2. Building Capacity, Building Expertise
   - Provide professional development that supports educators by supplying them with current information on reading and writing research (e.g., journal summaries, abstracts and information on trends)
   - Provide training and resources for teaching cross-curricular reading and writing skills
   - Support innovative initiatives and effective practices to promote literacy in schools, particularly for students at risk

3. Targeting and Supporting Students at Risk

- Focus on
  - students at risk, as defined by *Think Literacy Success, Grades 7–12: The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario* (2003)
  - students who have been unsuccessful on the OSSLT
  - students enrolled in locally developed programs and ESL/ELD programs
  - students making the transition from elementary to secondary school who need additional support in acquiring reading and writing skills
  - applied level students who need specific remedial interventions
- Make use of the range of Ministry of Education supports available to Ontario secondary schools, including locally developed (essential) courses and the following curriculum courses: the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course, Learning Strategies, and Literacy Skills: Reading and Writing
- Use subject content and the classroom context to provide explicit literacy instruction that relates reading and writing skills to practical and purposeful situations and to daily life
- Review the accommodations being provided to students with special needs to ensure that the accommodations are appropriate to the student's needs, familiar to the student, used by the student on a regular basis for in-school assessment, and in the student's IEP

4. Implementing Technology

- Support access to and implementation of technology as a tool for developing reading, writing and research skills in the classroom
- Integrate traditional text forms with electronic forms of information and communication and popular media

5. Collaborating with Education and Community Partners

- Encourage board and school literacy committees and teachers across panels and subjects to share effective cross-curricular instructional practices and to engage in professional discourse as they analyze assessment data and plan adaptations to instruction that will improve students' reading and writing skills
- Collaborate with families, school councils and community partners, including workplace mentors, to develop projects to provide students with academic support services, "real life" contexts for the application of literacy skills, and access to communication technology, including the Internet, outside school

EQAO data has been useful in developing strategies for students.

–Lesleigh Dye, Student Success Leader, Ottawa Carleton District School Board

Strategies that focus on literacy skills can have a significant effect on student learning.

–Stephen Blake, Principal, Sinclair Secondary School, Whitby

In recognition of the effective training in learning strategies and assessment practices they provide, EQAO recommends that **faculties of education**

- continue to assist pre-service teachers in gaining a thorough understanding of strategies for integrating literacy skills into subject-based curricula and of ways in which assessment, including large-scale assessment, informs instruction.

EQAO continues to collaborate with the **Ministry of Education**

- in using the accumulated OSSLT provincial assessment data along with other information to inform current curriculum initiatives for at-risk students.

Strategies for Instruction

The OSSLT is aligned with the expectations that require reading and writing skills in all subjects, in *The Ontario Curriculum* up to the end of Grade 9. The data from the OSSLT provide an additional link to practices recommended in *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches.*

Based on the data from the October 2003 OSSLT, EQAO has developed the following specific suggestions for instruction.

EQAO suggests that, *because*

- *students have been more successful on the writing component than on the reading component of all three administrations (84% passed writing and 80% passed reading in February 2002; 85% passed writing and 76% passed reading in October 2002; and 85% passed writing and 82% passed reading in October 2003),* **teachers** in all subject areas encourage students to develop their vocabulary, practise determining meaning from context, identify main ideas and learn to identify organizational patterns in texts.
- *only 35% of first-time eligible students indicated that they read more than three hours a week outside school,* **principals, teachers and parents** collaborate to identify approaches that will encourage students to read a variety of materials for school, leisure and life-related purposes.
- *only 31% of first-time eligible students indicated that they use a computer almost every day for school work, while 97% indicated they have a computer at home,* **teachers and parents** collaborate to encourage students to use word processing and online resources for school work at home.
- *students have the most difficulty in passing reading,* **teachers** of all subjects focus on developing subject-specific vocabulary, using tools such as word walls, subject-specific crosswords, personal glossaries, word banks, concept maps and online and print dictionaries, and strategies such as examining context to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words, decoding unfamiliar expressions by reading past then going back and guessing, visualizing words divided into syllables and considering roots, prefixes and suffixes.

- *informational selections presented the greatest challenge for all students,* **teachers** of all subjects emphasize identifying the main idea, distinguishing fact from opinion, drawing conclusions and recognizing sequencing patterns such as cause and effect in expository texts.
- *a large proportion of students offered irrelevant, off-topic and off-task responses to the writing tasks,* **teachers** emphasize the importance of writing in the correct form and reading topics carefully.
- *a large proportion of students did not respond to the summary task,* **teachers** increase instructional attention on building the ability to write summaries with confidence.
- *the difference between students who were successful at writing the summary and those who were not appears to be the ability to identify the main idea of a text,* **teachers** of all subjects focus their instruction on assisting students to identify the main idea in a variety of types of text.
- *the difference between students who were successful at writing the opinion piece and those who were not seems to be the ability to choose one side of an issue, to provide a sufficient number of supporting details and to organize them coherently,* **teachers** provide opportunities for students to write opinion pieces using graphic organizers for prewriting and linking ideas with transitional words and phrases.
- *the difference between students who were successful at writing the information paragraph and those who were not seems to be the ability to identify a main idea, to select relevant details and to present them in an organized paragraph,* **teachers** encourage students to categorize information according to its relationship to a common main idea and to express the main idea and supporting details in a coherent, well-structured paragraph.
- *a large number of markers were concerned about the students' spelling and syntax,* **teachers** of all subjects encourage their students to spell accurately and to use proper syntax.

A large number of markers were concerned about the students' spelling and syntax.

References and Links

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, October 2003, Report of Provincial Results
www.eqao.com

EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning
www.eqao.com

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Building Pathways to Success, Grades 7–12: The Report of the Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group (2003)
www.edu.gov.on.ca

Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12 (2003)
(available to school boards only)

Preparing Students for the OSSLT: Best Practices from Ontario School Boards (2003)
www.edu.gov.on.ca

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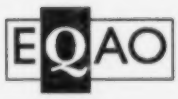

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Message from the Chair

The Board of Directors of the Education Quality and Accountability Office is pleased to present the *Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, October 2003, Report of Provincial Results.*

The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) yields reliable, high-quality information on how well secondary students are meeting curriculum expectations. It also provides a focus for discussion on improvement. EQAO achievement information promotes dialogue among educators, school councils, parents and students as they work together to set goals and identify strategies that will help Ontario students find success in the classroom and in life.

This report presents data on first-time eligible students as well as on previously eligible students. It includes samples of reading and writing test items, with expected answers. These samples illustrate how the OSSLT reflects the Ontario secondary school curriculum.

There are a number of recommendations in this report, including strategies to improve English literacy, ways to use the information in the report and approaches to building expertise and targeting students who need improvement.

EQAO continues to be committed to providing information that assists schools, school councils and school boards in their improvement efforts, with the goal of allowing all Ontario students to benefit from a high-quality education. We trust that you will find the report informative and useful.

Jerry G. Ponikvar

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The Education Quality and Accountability Office

Working together to improve student learning

Assessment is important in education because it provides students, families, educators and policy-makers with information about students' strengths and weaknesses. Everyone should use this information to acknowledge students' strengths, while developing strategies to improve students' learning.

—Linda Henshaw, Grade 10 Teacher
John Fraser Secondary School, Peel District School Board

Mandate

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is dedicated to working with the education community and to enhancing the quality and accountability of the education system in Ontario. This will be achieved through student assessments that produce objective, reliable and relevant information, and through the timely public release of this information along with recommendations for system improvement.

About EQAO

EQAO is an arm's-length agency of the Ontario government. The agency evaluates and reports on the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary education in the province and makes recommendations to school boards for improvement.

As part of its mandate to improve the quality of education in Ontario, EQAO develops and administers several province-wide assessments. The results of these assessments yield individual, school, school board and provincial data on student achievement. Working together with Ontario's education community, EQAO provides parents, students, educators, administrators and the public with information about the public education system in our province. Parents and students receive an Individual Student Report about the student's assessment achievement. Schools and school boards create their own reports of EQAO data for distribution to parents and others in their communities. EQAO posts school, school board and provincial results on its Web site (www.eqao.com) for public access.

Values

- EQAO values student learning above all other interests.
- EQAO values information that has the potential to bring about constructive change and improvement.
- EQAO values the dedication and expertise of Ontario's educators and works in partnership with them in all of its activities.
- EQAO values the delivery of its programs and services with equivalent quality in both English and French.

Activities

- EQAO designs and implements a comprehensive program of student assessment within government-established parameters.
- EQAO reports to the Minister, the public and the education community on assessment and education issues and makes recommendations for improvement.
- EQAO promotes research in best practices in assessment and accountability.
- EQAO leads Ontario's participation in national and international assessments.

Programs

- The Grade 3 and Grade 6 Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics are based on the expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8.*
- The Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics assesses the knowledge and skills of students in Grade 9 applied and academic programs, based on the corresponding expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: Mathematics.*
- The OSSLT assesses the essential reading and writing skills that apply to all subject areas in *The Ontario Curriculum* up to the end of Grade 9.
- Improvement planning enhances student outcomes by increasing district school boards' and schools' capacity to design and manage change.
- The School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) is a national testing program that tests samples of 13- and 16-year-old students.
- The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) involves students in Grades 4 and 8 in a sample of schools.
- The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluates the performance of 15-year-old students in a sample of schools, in mathematics, science and reading.
- The Education Quality Indicators Program (EQUIP) is a framework of key contextual measures that educators and administrators use to interpret their student achievement data. These measures identify unique features of the school and community and assist school boards and schools in using EQAO data for improvement planning.
- The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) assesses the reading literacy of Grade 4 students in a sample of schools.

Background

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test

The OSSLT, which the Ministry of Education announced in 1998, is a graduation requirement and is administered by EQAO. The OSSLT assesses the reading and writing skills that students are expected to have learned in all subjects by the end of Grade 9, as outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*. The first administration under the graduation requirement occurred in February 2002. The October 2003 OSSLT was administered across Ontario in two blocks of two and a half hours each (including breaks and instructions): one on the morning of October 22 and one on the morning of October 23. This report describes the achievement results from the October 2003 administration of the OSSLT.

To meet the requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), students must successfully complete both the reading component and the writing component of the OSSLT or complete the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC). Students who are unsuccessful on one or both components of the OSSLT may rewrite the component(s) during the next full administration of the test. Students who have been eligible to write the OSSLT twice and have been unsuccessful at least once are eligible for the OSSLC, which is offered in Grade 12. Successful completion of this course satisfies the graduation requirement.

Principals have indicated that they use a wide range of strategies to improve literacy among their students and to create a positive attitude toward the test. These strategies include the establishment of literacy committees, the encouragement of all teachers in the school to assume responsibility for literacy, assemblies, tutors, small-group meetings with students, communication with parents and opportunities for students to practise demonstrating the skills tested by the OSSLT.

Successful improvement strategies for reading and writing come from a school-wide focus and use of expertise and resources from the board; other schools, including elementary schools; and colleagues and EQAO data. Instead of making literacy only a school goal, make it a whole community goal.

–Stephen Blake, Principal, Sinclair Secondary School

Design and Development of the OSSLT

EQAO's education officers work in consultation with educators from across the province on all aspects of the OSSLT: design, development, bias checks, field testing, administration, marking and reporting. The OSSLT is developed in keeping with the *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada* (1993), a document created by representatives of national education institutions and associations and widely endorsed by Canada's education community.

Parallel versions of the OSSLT are developed for English- and French-language schools. Although the questions are different, the overall content of the English- and French-language versions is comparable. The versions have the same number and kinds of reading and writing tasks but reflect the variations in the curricula for the two languages.

Standards for the OSSLT

The standards for the OSSLT describe a minimum acceptable level of student achievement.

The standards for the OSSLT describe a minimum acceptable level of student achievement. They describe student performance in reading and writing that meets or exceeds the minimum criteria (passed) or does not meet the minimum criteria (did not pass).

The OSSLT standards were developed through a three-stage consultation with the education community and the public. First, EQAO administered a field test to Ontario students, which was then scored by Ontario educators, using the scoring procedures that would be used for the actual test. Second, a number of student performances on the field test were evaluated by a committee made up of educators, experts from several Canadian universities, and members of the public, including business representatives. EQAO and other assessment experts provided this committee with training on the curriculum requirements and how they relate to the test. The committee then examined the student performances on the field test and, without knowing the educators' scores, sorted them into acceptable and unacceptable performances. Third, the tests were examined to determine the scores that best distinguished those papers that passed from those that did not pass. For more details, see the "Standard-Setting Process" on the EQAO Web site.

Procedures to Ensure Consistency

The consistency of the test content and of the conditions under which the test is administered ensure comparable opportunities for students to demonstrate the skills measured by the test.

EQAO has specific procedures in place to ensure testing is consistent, so that it is fair for all students. Students must work independently in a quiet environment, supervised by teachers. Teachers are given a script that must be followed to ensure that a common message is given to all students throughout the province. The conditions of the test administration include a time limit. Students work on one booklet at a time, in a predetermined order, and must seal each booklet as they complete it.

Students with special needs are provided with accommodations according to the Ministry of Education's Policy/Program Memorandum No. 127. English as a second language (ESL) and English literacy development (ELD) students are provided with special provisions described in EQAO's *Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals and Exemptions.*

Each school is sent an English- or French-language CD-ROM for training teachers to administer the test. Additional resources, such as guides and instructions, are provided to ensure the same administrative and accommodation procedures are followed for all students across the province. These procedures follow the *Principles for Fair Student Assessment Practices for Education in Canada* (1993).

The consistency of the test content and of the conditions under which the test is administered ensure comparable opportunities for students to demonstrate the skills measured by the test.

Quality Assurance

During the administration of the OSSLT, quality assurance monitors visit English-language public, Catholic and private schools selected at random from across the province. Monitors examine security procedures for the test materials before, during and after the test and determine how consistently the test is being administered. For the October 2003 OSSLT, monitors reported that all schools maintained tight security: test materials were stored in secure locations, such as the school vault or the principal's office, and individual student test materials were kept unopened in their packaging before the start of the test.

Marking

Before the OSSLT is marked, all of the student papers are scrambled so that they can be distributed randomly to the markers. In addition, all of the student papers go through "blind scoring," with no names or other information on the student work that might allow a marker to identify a student, a school or a school board.

Throughout the marking process, EQAO takes steps to ensure that student papers are scored consistently. This involves training, a qualifying test for markers, group-marking papers and double marking for performances close to the pass mark. These steps are described in the "Summary Paper on Quality Assurance Measures and Reliability and Validity Processes" on the EQAO Web site.

For the October 2003 OSSLT, virtually all markers (98%) were satisfied with the training they received to score student work accurately and effectively.

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There is an Explanation of Terms and Categories at the end of this report.

Further information about elements of the OSSLT, such as preparation for the test and administration, are available on the EQAO Web site.

First-Time Eligible Students

Results at a Glance

In the following tables and graphs are overall results and data comparisons over time for English-language students who wrote the OSSLT in publicly funded schools.

Data Comparison over Time

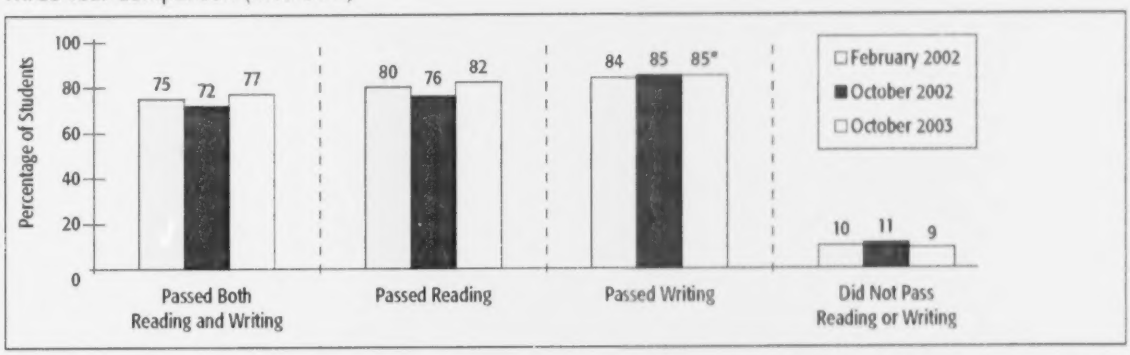
Method 1[1] (comprises all students in the cohort)

	February 2002		October 2002		October 2003	
	#	%[2]	#	%	#	%
Passed Both Reading and Writing	97 227	69%	97 459	67%	109 609	70%
Passed Reading Only	6 747	5%	5 797	4%	7 858	5%
Passed Writing Only	12 209	9%	17 870	12%	12 672	8%
Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	12 849	9%	14 902	10%	12 886	8%
Absent One or Both Days	5 889	4%	3 991	3%	6 612	4%
Deferred	6 140	4%	6 520	4%	7 827	5%
Total Number of Students	141 061		146 539		157 464	
Number of Students Exempted	1 147		1 637		2 253	

Method 2[3] (comprises only students in the cohort who wrote the OSSLT)

	February 2002		October 2002		October 2003	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Passed Both Reading and Writing	97 227	75%	97 459	72%	109 609	77%
Passed Reading Only	6 747	5%	5 797	4%	7 858	5%
Passed Writing Only	12 209	9%	17 870	13%	12 672	9%
Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	12 849	10%	14 902	11%	12 886	9%
Students Participating	129 032	91%	136 028	93%	143 025	91%

Three-Year Comparison (Method 2)

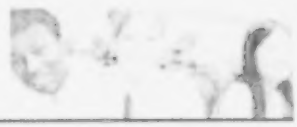


* The 1% difference between this percentage and the combined percentages of those who passed writing only (from the preceding table) and those who passed both reading and writing is attributable to double rounding effects associated with adding the percentages.

The graph above shows the percentage of students who passed both reading and writing, the total percentage who passed reading, the total percentage who passed writing and the total percentage who did not pass reading or writing.

Observations:

- There has been a 5% increase over last year in the percentage of students who successfully completed the OSSLT.
- A larger percentage of students passed reading in October 2003 (82%) than in October 2002 (76%).
- Students' achievement in writing has remained relatively stable for three test administrations (84% passed in February 2002, and 85% passed in both October 2002 and October 2003).
- Overall, more students passed the writing component than the reading component.



Participation in the October 2003 OSSLT

First-time eligible students[1] who participated in the October 2003 OSSLT entered Grade 9 in September 2002 and were working toward an OSSD. The following table presents the number of students who took part in the test by program of study, gender and student status.

	Population	Percentage Absent One or Both Days	Percentage Deferred	Percentage Fully Participating
All Students	157 464	4%	5%	91%
Program of Study				
Academic Program	101 327	2%	1%	97%
Applied Program	41 493	7%	5%	88%
Locally Developed Program	5 281	11%	27%	62%
Gender				
Female	75 023	3%	4%	93%
Male	79 904	4%	6%	90%
Student Status				
ESL/ELD	8 589	6%	40%	54%
Special Needs (excluding gifted)	20 426	5%	11%	84%

Observations:

- The participation rate was highest among students enrolled in the academic program and lowest among those enrolled in locally developed programs. The participation rate of students enrolled in the applied program was slightly lower than the participation rate for all students.
- Of the ESL/ELD learners who were eligible to write, more than half participated. There were more ESL/ELD learners who participated this year (54%) than last year (45%).
- Of the students with special needs (excluding gifted) who were eligible to write, over 80% participated this year. A smaller percentage of students with special needs participated this year (84%) than last year (87%).

Profile of Students Who Wrote the OSSLT

Program of Study[5]							
Academic		Applied		Locally Developed		No Response	
Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
98 709	69%	36 545	26%	3262	2%	4509	3%

Gender[6]	Number	Percentage
Female	69 529	49%
Male	71 961	50%
No Response	1 535	1%

Student Status[7]	Number	Percentage
ESL/ELD Learners	4 677	3%

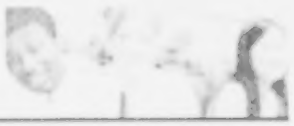
Language Spoken at Home[8]	Number	Percentage
Only or Mostly English	106 242	75%
English As Often As Another Language	23 749	17%
Only or Mostly a Language Other Than English	11 120	8%

First Language[9]	Number	Percentage
First Language Learned at Home Was One Other Than English	33 465	24%

Student Status[10]	Number	Percentage
Students Who Have Been Formally Identified by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) As Having Special Needs (excluding gifted)	12 863	9%
Students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) (excluding gifted)	17 183	12%

Observations:

- The majority of students who wrote the OSSLT were in the academic program.
- Although the proportion of ESL/ELD learners participating in the OSSLT was small (3%), it is worth noting that approximately one in four students who wrote the OSSLT reported that their first language was a language other than English, and 8% reported speaking a language other than English at home.



Results by Student Characteristic (Method 2)

The following tables present achievement information, including results by program (academic, applied and locally developed), by gender, as well as for ESL/ELD learners and students with special needs.

The percentages below are based on Method 2.

Results by Program of Study

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Academic Program # = 98 709	88 480	90%	3 419	3%	4 525	5%	2 285	2%
Applied Program # = 36 545	17 987	49%	3 778	10%	6 911	19%	7 869	22%
Locally Developed Program # = 3252	602	18%	236	7%	631	19%	1 793	55%

Observations:

- The percentage of students who successfully completed the OSSLT varied significantly by program.
- The percentage of students enrolled in the academic program who were successful was considerably larger than the percentages in the applied program and in locally developed programs.
- Students in the academic program performed equally well in reading and writing: 93% passed the reading component and 94%[11] passed the writing component.
- Of students enrolled in applied and locally developed programs, more were successful in writing than in reading.
  - Of students enrolled in the applied program, 60%[12] passed the reading component and 68% passed the writing component.
  - Of students enrolled in locally developed programs, 26%[13] passed the reading component and 38%[14] passed the writing component.

Results by Gender

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Participating Students # = 143 025	109 609	77%	7 858	5%	12 672	9%	12 886	9%
Female # = 69 529	55 756	80%	2 838	4%	6 052	9%	4 883	7%
Male # = 71 961	52 805	73%	4 892	7%	6 461	9%	7 803	11%

Observations:

- Females generally performed better than males on the OSSLT, especially in writing, where the gender gap is 7%, compared to 4% in reading.
- In writing, 89% of the females passed, whereas 82% of the males passed.
- In reading, 84% of the females passed, whereas 80% of the males passed.

Results of ESL/ELD Learners

Participating ESL/ELD Learners

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
ESL/ELD # = 4677	1952	42%	151	3%	1256	27%	1318	28%

Observation:

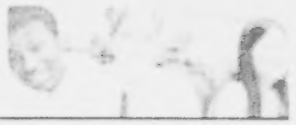
- More ESL/ELD learners passed writing than reading: 45% passed the reading component and 69% passed the writing component.

ESL/ELD Learners Receiving Special Provisions

	Number	Percentage
ESL/ELD Learners Who Wrote with Special Provisions	3468	74%

Observation:

- About three-quarters of the ESL/ELD learners who wrote the OSSLT received special provisions.



Number and Percentage of ESL/ELD Learners Receiving Each Type of Special Provision

	Changes in Setting of the Test	Timing	
		Additional Time	Periodic Supervised Breaks
# = 3468	1941 (56%)	3440 (99%)	1226 (35%)

Observations:

- The total number of special provisions exceeds the total number of students who received these provisions, since many ESL/ELD learners needed more than one special provision.
- The most common special provision was additional time.
- Of ESL/ELD learners, 29% received all three types of special provisions.
- Compared to previous years, a smaller percentage of ESL/ELD learners received changes in the setting of the test (76% in February 2002 and 63% in October 2002) and periodic supervised breaks (56% in February 2002 and 46% in October 2002).

Results of ESL/ELD Learners Receiving Special Provisions

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
ESL/ELD Receiving Special Provisions # = 3468	1500	43%	105	3%	927	27%	936	27%
All Other ESL/ELD Learners # = 1209	452	37%	46	4%	329	27%	382	32%

Observations:

- ESL/ELD learners who did not receive special provisions were not as successful as students who received special provisions. Of ESL/ELD learners who did not receive special provisions, 41% passed the reading component and 65%[15] passed the writing component.
- Consistent with ESL/ELD learners in general, more ESL/ELD learners who received special provisions passed writing than passed reading. Of ESL/ELD learners receiving special provisions, 46% passed the reading component and 70% passed the writing component.

Results of Students with Special Needs (Excluding Gifted)

Participating Students with Special Needs

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Special Needs # = 17 183	7886	46%	1372	8%	3311	19%	4614	27%

Observation:

- More students with special needs passed writing than passed reading. Of students with special needs, 54% passed the reading component and 65% passed the writing component.

Students with Special Needs Receiving Accommodations

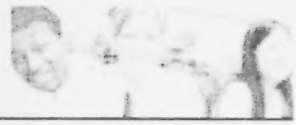
	Number	Percentage
Students with Special Needs Who Wrote with Accommodations	15 382	90%

Number and Percentage of Students with Special Needs Receiving Each Type of Accommodation

	Changes in Setting for the Test	Timing	Different Presentation Format	Different Response Format	Other Accommodation
# = 15 382	12 810 (83%)	15 056 (98%)	5111 (33%)	4682 (30%)	27 (<1%)

Observations:

- Students with special needs often require two or more types of accommodation. For example, students who are blind may require Braille or large-print booklets and may also require extra time, scribing, breaks and/or a separate location. For this reason, the total number of accommodations provided exceeds the total number of students accommodated.
- The most common accommodations were timing and changes in the setting for the test.
- Most accommodated first-time eligible students were provided with two accommodations.



Results of Students with Special Needs Receiving Accommodations

		Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Special Needs	Received Accommodations, IEP Only # = 3361	1669	50%	270	8%	661	20%	761	23%
	Received Accommodations, IEP and IPRC # = 12 021	5212	43%	951	8%	2389	20%	3469	29%

Observation:

- Consistent with special needs students in general, those receiving accommodations were significantly more successful on the writing component than on the reading component.

Detailed Reading Results by Skill and Type of Selection

The following table presents average student scores for each reading skill and reading selection type. The results of students who passed the reading component and those who did not are shown separately. The average scores are shown both as mean scores and as average percentage correct.

	Average Score of Students Who Passed Reading # = 117 467	Average Score of Students Who Did Not Pass Reading # = 25 554
Reading Skill		
Understands directly stated ideas and information	49/60 (or 82%)*	33/60 (or 55%)
Understands indirectly stated ideas and information	71/90 (or 79%)	46/90 (or 51%)
Makes connections between personal experience and the ideas and information in the reading selections	36/50 (or 72%)	22/50 (or 44%)
Reading Selection Type		
Information (e.g., explanation, opinion)	69/90 (or 77%)	41/90 (or 46%)
Graphic (e.g., graph, schedule, instructions)	41/50 (or 82%)	28/50 (or 56%)
Narrative (e.g., story, dialogue)	46/60 (or 77%)	31/60 (or 52%)

* The average score of students who passed the OSSLT was 49 out of 60 points or 82% on this reading skill.

Observations for Reading:

- Students' performances on items that required them to understand directly and indirectly stated ideas and information were better than their performances on items that required them to make connections between personal experience and the ideas and information in the reading selections. This pattern was evident in the results of both those who passed and those who did not pass the reading component.

- Both students who passed and those who did not pass performed better on reading and answering questions about graphic selections than information and narrative selections, but those who did not pass had particular difficulty reading and answering questions about information selections. Both those who passed and those who did not pass had higher average scores (82% and 56%) for reading and answering questions about graphic selections.

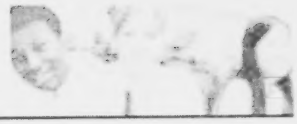
Detailed Writing Results by Writing Task

The following four tables show the distribution of student performance on each of the four writing tasks. The results of students who passed the writing component and those who did not are shown separately.

Summary	Students Who Passed Writing # = 122 281	Students Who Did Not Pass Writing # = 20 744
• accurately captures the main idea and at least two supporting details from the original in an organized manner	74%	17%
• captures only two ideas* from the original, with lapses in organization	18%	24%
• captures only one idea* from the original, and/or errors prevent clear communication	6%	20%
• Blank or illegible	2%	27%
• Irrelevant content or off task: not a summary	1%	13%

* May or may not include the main idea.

Paragraphs Expressing an Opinion	Students Who Passed Writing # = 122 281	Students Who Did Not Pass Writing # = 20 744
• express a clear opinion with sufficient supporting details, in an organized manner	94%	43%
• express an unclear opinion with insufficient supporting details and/or lapses in organization	6%	46%
• express an unsupported opinion, and/or errors prevent clear communication	<1%	1%
• Blank or illegible	<1%	8%
• Irrelevant content, off topic or off task: not an opinion piece	<1%	1%



News Report	Students Who Passed Writing # = 122 281	Students Who Did Not Pass Writing # = 20 744
• presents sufficient information, in an organized manner	89%	24%
• presents insufficient facts and information partly in the form of a news report with lapses in organization	8%	31%
• presents unrelated facts and information partly in the form of a news report, and/or errors prevent clear communication	<1%	<1%
• Blank or illegible	<1%	13%
• Irrelevant content, off topic or off task: not a news report	3%	32%

Information Paragraph	Students Who Passed Writing # = 122 281	Students Who Did Not Pass Writing # = 20 744
• organized around a clear main idea and including at least four supporting details from the list provided	70%	17%
• with errors and lapses in paragraph structure and fewer than four details related to a main idea, from the list provided	28%	57%
• without a main idea, and/or errors prevent clear communication	1%	9%
• Blank or illegible	<1%	13%
• Irrelevant content, off topic or off task: not in the form of an exposition	<1%	4%

Observations for Writing:

- The students were most successful in writing a series of paragraphs expressing an opinion and in writing the news report. This was true for both those who passed and those who did not pass writing.
- All students, but especially students who did not pass the writing component, found the summary and information paragraph tasks most challenging.
- There were fewer blank responses from all students and to all tasks in October 2003 than in October 2002. This was especially true of the summary (5% blank responses in 2003 and 8% in 2002). There were more blank responses to the summary than to any other task. Of students who did not pass, 27% did not respond to the summary prompt, 13% did not respond to each of the news report and the information paragraph prompts, and 8% did not respond to the opinion prompt.
- Students who did not pass writing provided responses that were irrelevant, off topic or off task most commonly for the news report (32%). Considerably fewer gave irrelevent, off-topic or off-task responses to the remaining three prompts (13% for the summary, 1% for the paragraph expressing an opinion and 4% for the information paragraph).

Students' Learning Environment

Each student was asked to complete a Student Questionnaire with the assessment. The response rate was 90%.

Student Computer Use

Percentage of students indicating that	All # = 142 175	Female # = 70 374	Male # = 71 801
they have a computer at home	97%	97%	96%
they use the computer almost every day for school work	31%	33%	30%

Reading and Writing Outside School

Percentage of students indicating that	All # = 142 175	Female # = 70 374	Male # = 71 801
they read English outside school for more than three hours a week (not counting homework)	35%	39%	31%
they read the following kinds of material outside school most weeks:			
• non-fiction books, e.g., biographies	24%	25%	23%
• comics	33%	30%	37%
• Web sites, e-mail, chat messages	79%	83%	75%
• letters	30%	42%	19%
• magazines	74%	82%	65%
• manuals, instructions	21%	15%	27%
• newspapers	45%	42%	48%
• novels, fiction, short stories	56%	66%	46%
• poetry, song lyrics	42%	55%	28%
• religious or spiritual readings	14%	16%	12%

Percentage of students indicating that	All # = 142 175	Female # = 70 374	Male # = 71 801
they write in English outside school more than three hours a week (not counting homework)	27%	31%	23%
they do the following types of writing outside school most weeks:			
• e-mail messages, chat-room conversations	89%	92%	87%
• letters, journals, diaries	36%	58%	14%
• notes, directions, instructions	34%	39%	29%
• song lyrics, poems	32%	39%	25%
• stories, fiction	18%	20%	15%
• work-related writing	35%	35%	35%

Observations:

- The majority of students (65%) indicated that they do not read outside school for more than three hours a week. This was also true of writing: the majority of students (73%) reported that they do not write for more than three hours a week. This has been a consistent trend through the years.
- A larger percentage of female than male students reported that they read outside school for more than three hours a week. This was true for writing as well.
- A larger percentage of male students than female students reported that they read each of the following most weeks: newspapers, comics, and manuals or instructions.
- A larger percentage of female students than male students reported reading each of the following most weeks: Web sites, e-mail or chat messages; magazines; novels, fiction or short stories; poetry or song lyrics; and letters.
- A larger percentage of female students than male students reported writing each of the following most weeks: letters, journals or diaries; song lyrics or poems; and notes, directions or instructions.
- Electronic communications and popular media were reading materials that both genders reported reading most weeks.

Overall Findings (Method 2)

- There has been a 5% increase over last year in the percentage of students who successfully completed the OSSLT.
- A larger percentage of students passed reading in October 2003 (82%) than in October 2002 (76%).
- Students' achievement in writing has remained relatively stable for three test administrations (84% passed in February 2002, and 85% passed in both October 2002 and October 2003).
- As in previous years, a larger percentage of students enrolled in the academic program than in the applied and in locally developed programs successfully completed the OSSLT.
- Overall, more students passed the writing component than the reading component. This trend was also evident among students in the following subgroups: ESL/ELD learners, students enrolled in the applied and in locally developed programs and students with special needs.
- Of the ESL/ELD learners who were eligible to write, more than half participated this year. The participation rate of ESL/ELD learners increased by 9% over last year.
- Females generally performed better on the OSSLT than males, especially in writing. In writing, the gender gap was 7%, compared to 4% in reading.
- The majority of students (65%) indicated that they do not read outside school for more than three hours a week. This was also true of writing: the majority of first-time eligible students (73%) reported that they do not write for more than three hours a week. This has been a consistent trend through the years.
- A large percentage (97%) of students reported having a computer at home; 31% of students reported using a computer almost every day for school work.
- Electronic communications and popular media were the materials that both genders reported reading most weeks.
- E-mail messages and chat-room conversations were the types of writing in which the largest percentage of students engaged most weeks.

Previously Eligible Students

Results at a Glance

In the following tables are overall results, data comparisons over time and detailed results for English-language students who wrote the OSSLT in publicly funded schools.

Data Comparison over Time

Method 1 (comprises all students in the cohort)

	October 2002		October 2003	
	#	%	#	%
Successfully Completed the OSSLT	16 027	43%	27 950	50%
Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful	17 281	46%	18 145	32%
Absent One or Both Days	2 203	6%	5 182	9%
Deferred	1 731	5%	785	1%
Planning to Fulfill Requirement Through OSSLC	n/a	n/a	3 972	7%
Total Number of Students	37 242		56 034	
Number of Students Exempted	350		221	

Method 2 (comprises only students in the cohort who wrote the OSSLT)

	October 2002		October 2003	
	#	%	#	%
Successfully Completed the OSSLT	16 027	48%	27 950	61%
Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful	17 281	52%	18 145	39%
Students Participating	33 308	89%	46 095	82%

Observations:

- The previously eligible-student cohort for October 2003 comprises both students who were first-time eligible in February 2002 and those who were first-time eligible in October 2002. This accounts for the very large increase in the total number of previously eligible students in October 2003 over October 2002.
- Approximately three out of five participating students were successful in October 2003.
- Schools reported that 3972 students planned to fulfill the requirement through the OSSLC and did not write the OSSLT. The OSSLC option was offered for the first time in the 2003–2004 school year.

Detailed Results

Method 1

	October 2002		October 2003	
	#	%	#	%
Number Required to Pass Both Reading and Writing	20 386		27 329	
Passed Both Reading and Writing	5 645	28%	8 337	31%
Passed Reading Only	1 035	5%	2 267	8%
Passed Writing Only	4 714	23%	3 986	15%
Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	5 681	28%	6 236	23%
Absent One or Both Days	1 642	8%	4 602	17%
Deferred	1 669	8%	642	2%
Planning to Fulfill Requirement Through OSSLC	n/a	n/a	1 259	5%
Number Required to Pass Reading Only	10 717		21 714	
Passed Reading	5 310	50%	14 890	69%
Did Not Pass Reading	5 075	47%	5 060	23%
Absent One or Both Days	291	3%	344	2%
Deferred	41	<1%	113	1%
Planning to Fulfill Requirement Through OSSLC	n/a	n/a	1 307	6%
Number Required to Pass Writing Only	6 139		5 812	
Passed Writing	5 072	83%	4 723	81%
Did Not Pass Writing	776	13%	596	10%
Absent One or Both Days	270	4%	236	4%
Deferred	21	<1%	30	1%
Planning to Fulfill Requirement Through OSSLC	n/a	n/a	227	4%
Component(s) Required to Pass Not Indicated				
Planning to Fulfill Requirement Through OSSLC	n/a		1 179	

Observations:

- Among students required to pass both reading and writing, the percentage of students absent one or both days is considerably larger than among students required to pass one component only. Among students required to pass both reading and writing, the percentage absent is more than double last year's.
- Of the students required to pass both reading and writing, the percentage of students deferred is smaller than last year's.

Method 2

	October 2002		October 2003	
	#	%	#	%
Number Required to Pass Both Reading and Writing	17 075		20 826	
Passed Both Reading and Writing	5 645	33%	8 337	40%
Passed Reading Only	1 035	6%	2 267	11%
Passed Writing Only	4 714	28%	3 986	19%
Did Not Pass Reading or Writing	5 681	33%	6 236	30%
Number Required to Pass Reading Only	10 385		19 950	
Passed Reading	5 310	51%	14 890	75%
Did Not Pass Reading	5 075	49%	5 060	25%
Number Required to Pass Writing Only	5 848		5 319	
Passed Writing	5 072	87%	4 723	89%
Did Not Pass Writing	776	13%	596	11%

Observations:

- The success rates of previously eligible students were higher for writing than reading. This is consistent with the findings for first-time eligible students.
- Of the students required to pass both reading and writing,
  - two-fifths passed both components.
  - more passed writing than reading: about half passed reading and three-fifths passed writing.
  - over 50% passed reading in October 2003, whereas 39% did in October 2002.
- Of the students required to pass reading only,
  - three-quarters of the students in October 2003 were successful, whereas half were successful in October 2002.

Participation in the October 2003 OSSLT

Previously eligible students[16] are those in Cohort 1 (those who entered Grade 9 in September 2000 and any others who were placed in this cohort) and those in Cohort 2 (those who entered Grade 9 in September 2001 and any others who were placed in this cohort). Cohort 1 students were required to write the OSSLT for the first time in February 2002. Cohort 2 students were required to write it for the first time in October 2002. Previously eligible students are those who were deferred, absent or unsuccessful when writing the first time. The following table presents the number of previously eligible students who took part in the test, by gender and by student status.

	Population	Percentage Absent One or Both Days	Percentage Deferred	Planning to Fulfill Requirement Through OSSLC	Percentage Fully Participating
All Previously Eligible Students	56 034	9%	1%	7%	82%
Gender					
Female	23 479	8%	1%	7%	83%
Male	31 813	10%	1%	7%	82%
Student Status					
ESL/ELD	2 330	5%	9%	3%	83%
Special Needs (excluding gifted)	15 987	9%	2%	6%	83%

Observations:

- Compared to first-time eligible students, a larger proportion of previously eligible students are male (57% versus 51%) and a larger proportion have special needs (29% versus 13%).
- Of the ESL/ELD learners eligible to write, more than four-fifths participated this year. A much larger percentage of ESL/ELD learners participated this year (83%) than last year (64%).
- Only 3% of ESL/ELD learners were reported as enrolled in the OSSLC, which is a smaller percentage than in the other subgroups.

Profile of Students Who Wrote the OSSLT

Gender[17]	Number	Percentage
Female	19 567	42%
Male	26 000	56%
No Response	500	1%

Student Status[18]	Number	Percentage
ESL/ELD Learners	1 927	4%

Language Spoken at Home[19]	Number	Percentage
Only or Mostly English	31 133	68%
English As Often As Another Language	9 170	20%
Only or Mostly a Language Other Than English	4 899	11%

First Language[20]	Number	Percentage
First Language Learned at Home Was One Other Than English	13 463	29%

Student Status[21]	Number	Percentage
Students Who Have Been Formally Identified by an IPRC as Having Special Needs (excluding gifted)	10 206	22%
Students with an IEP (excluding gifted)	13 285	29%

Observations:

- While an equal number of first-time eligible males and females participated in the OSSLT, more previously eligible males than females participated.
- Although the proportion of ESL/ELD learners participating in the OSSLT was small (4%), it is worth noting that more than one in four students who wrote the OSSLT reported that their first language was a language other than English, and 11% reported speaking a language other than English at home. These percentages are slightly larger than those for first-time eligible students.
- A larger percentage of participating previously eligible students (22%) than first-time eligible students (9%) had been formally identified by an IPRC.
- A larger percentage of participating previously eligible students (29%) than first-time eligible students (12%) had an IEP.

Results by Student Characteristic (Method 2)

The following tables present achievement information, including results by gender and by student status (ESL/ELD and special needs), from the third administration of the OSSLT, in October 2003.

The percentages provided for various student characteristics below are based on Method 2 (all previously eligible students who fully participated in the OSSLT).

Results by Gender

Overall Results

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful	
	#	%	#	%
Participating Previously Eligible Students # = 46 095	27 950	61%	18 145	39%
Female # = 19 587	12 309	63%	7 278	37%
Male # = 26 008	15 299	59%	10 709	41%

Detailed Results

	Required to Pass Both Reading and Writing All: # = 20 826 Female: # = 8276 Male: # = 12 358								Required to Pass Reading Only All: # = 19 950 Female: # = 9358 Male: # = 10 342				Required to Pass Writing Only All: # = 5319 Female: # = 1953 Male: # = 3308			
	Passed Both Reading and Writing		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing		Passed Reading		Did Not Pass Reading		Passed Writing		Did Not Pass Writing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Participating Previously Eligible Students # = 46 095	8 337	40%	2 267	11%	3 986	19%	6 236	30%	14 890	75%	5 060	25%	4 723	89%	596	11%
Female # = 19 587	3 553	43%	738	9%	1 773	21%	2 212	27%	6 960	74%	2 398	26%	1 796	92%	157	8%
Male # = 26 008	4 692	38%	1 510	12%	2 185	18%	3 971	32%	7 730	75%	2 612	25%	2 877	87%	431	13%

Observations:

- Of the students required to pass both reading and writing, a larger percentage of females than males were successful.
- Females and males did similarly well in reading, whereas in writing females had more success than males.

Results of ESL/ELD Learners

Overall Results

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful	
	#	%	#	%
ESL/ELD # = 1927	813	42%	1114	58%

Detailed Results

	Required to Pass Both Reading and Writing # = 1426								Required to Pass Reading Only # = 449				Required to Pass Writing Only # = 52			
	Passed Both Reading and Writing		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing		Passed Reading		Did Not Pass Reading		Passed Writing		Did Not Pass Writing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
ESL/ELD # = 1927	492	35%	53	4%	376	26%	505	35%	282	63%	167	37%	39	75%	13	25%

Observation:

- More ESL/ELD learners passed writing than passed reading.

ESL/ELD Learners Receiving Special Provisions

	Number	Percentage
ESL/ELD Learners Who Wrote with Special Provisions	1330	69%

Observation:

- More than two-thirds of the ESL/ELD learners who wrote the OSSLT received special provisions.

Number and Percentage of ESL/ELD Learners Receiving Special Provisions

	Changes in Setting of the Test	Timing	
		Additional Time	Periodic Supervised Breaks
# = 1330	829 (62%)	1308 (98%)	423 (32%)

Observations:

- The total number of special provisions exceeds the total number of students who received these provisions, since many ESL/ELD learners needed more than one special provision.
- The most common special provision was additional time.
- Of ESL/ELD learners, 31% received all three types of special provisions.
- A smaller percentage of ESL/ELD learners than in 2002 received changes in the setting of the test (62% in October 2003 versus 67% in October 2002) and periodic supervised breaks (32% in October 2003 versus 45% in October 2002).

Results for ESL/ELD Learners Receiving Special Provisions

Overall Results

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful	
	#	%	#	%
ESL/ELD Receiving Special Provisions # = 1330	581	44%	749	56%
All Other ESL/ELD Learners # = 597	232	39%	365	61%

Detailed Results

	Required to Pass Both Reading and Writing Receiving Special Provisions: # = 1005 All Other ESL/ELD Learners: # = 421								Required to Pass Reading Only Receiving Special Provisions: # = 291 All Other ESL/ELD Learners: # = 158				Required to Pass Writing Only Receiving Special Provisions: # = 34 All Other ESL/ELD Learners: # = 18			
	Passed Both Reading and Writing		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing		Passed Reading		Did Not Pass Reading		Passed Writing		Did Not Pass Writing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
ESL/ELD Receiving Special Provisions # = 1330	369	37%	29	3%	279	28%	328	33%	186	64%	105	36%	26	76%	8	24%
All Other ESL/ELD Learners # = 597	123	29%	24	6%	97	23%	177	42%	96	61%	62	39%	13	72%	5	28%

Observations:

- ESL/ELD learners receiving special provisions were more successful on the writing component than on the reading component.
- ESL/ELD learners who received special provisions were more successful than those who did not.

Results of Students with Special Needs (Excluding Gifted)

Overall Results

	Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful	
	#	%	#	%
Special Needs # = 13 285	6412	48%	6873	52%

Detailed Results

	Required to Pass Both Reading and Writing # = 6787								Required to Pass Reading Only # = 5472				Required to Pass Writing Only # = 1026			
	Passed Both Reading and Writing		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing		Passed Reading		Did Not Pass Reading		Passed Writing		Did Not Pass Writing	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Special Needs # = 13 285	2039	30%	656	10%	1394	21%	2698	40%	3493	64%	1979	36%	880	86%	146	14%

Observation:

- Students with special needs were more successful on the writing component than on the reading component.

Students with Special Needs Receiving Accommodations

	Number	Percentage
Students with Special Needs Who Wrote with Accommodations	12 077	91%

Number and Percentage of Students with Special Needs Receiving Each Type of Accommodation

	Changes in Setting for the Test	Timing	Different Presentation Format	Different Response Format	Other Accommodation
# = 12 077	10 054 (83%)	11 776 (98%)	4218 (35%)	3238 (27%)	23 (<1%)

Observations:

- Students with special needs often require two or more types of accommodation. For example, students who are blind may require Braille or large-print booklets and may also require extra time, scribing, breaks and/or a separate location. For this reason, the total number of accommodations provided exceeds the total number of students accommodated.
- The most common accommodations were extra time and changes in the setting of the test.
- Most accommodated students were provided with two accommodations.

Results of Students with Special Needs Receiving Accommodations

Overall Results

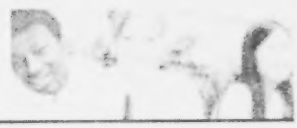
		Successfully Completed the OSSLT		Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful	
		#	%	#	%
Special Needs	Received Accommodations, IEP Only # = 2700	1510	56%	1190	44%
	Received Accommodations, IEP and IPRC # = 9377	4369	47%	5008	53%

Detailed Results

		Required to Pass Both Reading and Writing Receiving Accommodations IEP Only: # = 1282 IEP and IPRC: # = 4801								Required to Pass Reading Only Receiving Accommodations IEP Only: # = 1154 IEP and IPRC: # = 3912				Required to Pass Writing Only Receiving Accommodations IEP Only: # = 264 IEP and IPRC: # = 664			
		Passed Both Reading and Writing		Passed Reading Only		Passed Writing Only		Did Not Pass Reading or Writing		Passed Reading		Did Not Pass Reading		Passed Writing		Did Not Pass Writing	
		#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Special Needs	Receiving Accommodations, IEP Only # = 2700	474	37%	134	10%	267	21%	407	32%	794	69%	360	31%	242	92%	22	8%
	Receiving Accommodations, IEP and IPRC # = 9377	1370	29%	448	9%	1011	21%	1972	41%	2439	62%	1473	38%	560	84%	104	16%

Observation:

- Students with special needs receiving accommodations were more successful on the writing component than on the reading component.



Detailed Reading Results by Skill and Type of Selection

The following table presents average student scores for each reading skill and reading selection type. The results of students who passed the reading component and those who did not are shown separately. The average scores are shown both as mean scores and as average percentage correct.

	Average Score of Students Who Passed Reading # = 25 494	Average Score of Students Who Did Not Pass Reading # = 15 282
Reading Skill		
Understands directly stated ideas and information	44/60 (73%)*	33/60 (55%)
Understands indirectly stated ideas and information	65/90 (72%)	46/90 (51%)
Makes connections between personal experience and the ideas and information in the reading selections	33/50 (66%)	22/50 (44%)
Reading Selection Type		
Information (e.g., explanation, opinion)	61/90 (68%)	41/90 (46%)
Graphic (e.g., graph, schedule, instructions)	38/50 (76%)	28/50 (56%)
Narrative (e.g., story, dialogue)	43/60 (72%)	31/60 (52%)

* The average score of students who passed the OSSLT was 44 out of 60 points or 73% on this reading skill.

Observations for Reading:

- Students' performances on items that required them to understand directly and indirectly stated ideas and information were better than their performances on items that required them to make connections between personal experience and the ideas and information in the reading selections. This pattern was evident in the results of both those who passed and those who did not pass the reading component.
- Both students who passed and those who did not pass performed better on reading and answering questions about graphic selections than information and narrative selections; both groups had particular difficulty reading and answering questions about information selections.

Detailed Writing Results by Writing Task

The following four tables show the distribution of student performances on each of the four writing tasks. The results of students who passed the writing component and those who did not are shown separately.

Summary	Students Who Passed Writing # = 17 046	Students Who Did Not Pass Writing # = 9099
• accurately captures the main idea and at least two supporting details from the original in an organized manner	64%	15%
• captures only two ideas* from the original, with lapses in organization	22%	22%
• captures only one idea* from the original, and/or errors prevent clear communication	9%	19%
• Blank or illegible	3%	31%
• Irrelevant content or off task: not a summary	2%	13%

* May or may not include the main idea.

Paragraphs Expressing an Opinion	Students Who Passed Writing # = 17 046	Students Who Did Not Pass Writing # = 9099
• express a clear opinion with sufficient supporting details, in an organized manner	90%	37%
• express an unclear opinion with insufficient supporting details and/or lapses in organization	10%	49%
• express an unsupported opinion, and/or errors prevent clear communication	<1%	2%
• Blank or illegible	<1%	11%
• Irrelevant content, off topic or off task: not an opinion piece	<1%	1%

News Report	Students Who Passed Writing # = 17 046	Students Who Did Not Pass Writing # = 9099
• presents sufficient information, in an organized manner	85%	24%
• presents insufficient facts and information partly in the form of a news report with lapses in organization	12%	31%
• presents unrelated facts and information partly in the form of a news report, and/or errors prevent clear communication	<1%	<1%
• Blank or illegible	<1%	17%
• Irrelevant content, off topic or off task: not a news report	3%	28%

Information Paragraph	Students Who Passed Writing # = 17 046	Students Who Did Not Pass Writing # = 9099
• organized around a clear main idea and including at least four supporting details from the list provided	63%	16%
• with errors and lapses in paragraph structure and fewer than four details related to a main idea, from the list provided	34%	53%
• without a main idea, and/or errors prevent clear communication	2%	9%
• Blank or illegible	<1%	17%
• Irrelevant content, off topic or off task: not in the form of an exposition	<1%	5%

Observations for Writing:

- The students showed various degrees of proficiency in the four writing tasks. They were most successful in writing a series of paragraphs expressing an opinion and in writing a news report.
- All students, but especially those who did not pass the writing component, found the summary and information paragraph tasks most challenging.
- There were fewer blank responses from all students and to all tasks in October 2003 than in October 2002. Of students who did not pass, 31% did not respond to the summary prompt, 11% did not respond to the opinion prompt and 17% did not respond to each of the news report prompt and the information paragraph prompts.
- Students who did not pass writing provided responses that were irrelevant, off topic or off task most commonly for the news report (28%). Considerably fewer gave irrelevent, off-topic or off-task responses to the remaining three prompts (13% for the summary, 1% for the paragraph expressing an opinion and 5% for the information paragraph).

Students' Learning Environment

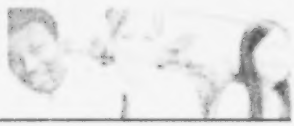
Each student was asked to complete a Student Questionnaire with the assessment. The response rate was 82%.

Student Computer Use

Percentage of students indicating that	All # = 45 854	Female # = 20 026	Male # = 25 828
they have a computer at home	93%	93%	93%
they use the computer almost every day for school work	30%	32%	29%

Reading and Writing Outside School

Percentage of students indicating that	All # = 45 854	Female # = 20 026	Male # = 25 828
they read English outside school for more than three hours a week (not counting homework)	23%	25%	22%
they read the following kinds of material outside school most weeks:			
• non-fiction books, e.g., biographies	21%	24%	20%
• comics	28%	23%	32%
• Web sites, e-mail, chat messages	69%	73%	65%
• letters	35%	49%	23%
• magazines	71%	80%	65%
• manuals, instructions	20%	14%	25%
• newspapers	46%	44%	48%
• novels, fiction, short stories	39%	51%	30%
• poetry, song lyrics	40%	54%	29%
• religious or spiritual readings	13%	16%	11%



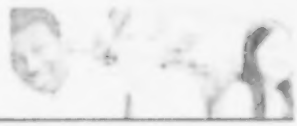
Percentage of students indicating that	All # = 45 854	Female # = 20 026	Male # = 25 828
they write in English outside school more than three hours a week (not counting homework)	23%	26%	21%
they do the following types of writing outside school most weeks:			
• e-mail messages, chat-room conversations	83%	86%	81%
• letters, journals, diaries	37%	62%	18%
• notes, directions, instructions	32%	37%	29%
• song lyrics, poems	34%	41%	28%
• stories, fiction	14%	16%	12%
• work-related writing	37%	37%	36%

Observations:

- The majority of students (77%) indicated that they do not read outside school for more than three hours a week. This was also true of writing: 77% of students reported that they do not write for more than three hours a week.
- A larger percentage of female than male students reported that they read outside school for more than three hours a week. This was true for writing as well.
- A larger percentage of male than female students reported that they read each of the following most weeks: comics and manuals or instructions.
- A larger percentage of female than male students reported reading each of the following most weeks: magazines; Web sites, e-mail or chat messages; poetry or song lyrics; novels, fiction or short stories; and letters.
- A larger percentage of female than male students reported writing each of the following most weeks: letters, journals or diaries; song lyrics or poems; and notes, directions or instructions.
- Electronic communications and popular media were reading materials that both genders reported reading most weeks.

Overall Findings (Method 2)

- Approximately three out of five previously eligible students successfully completed the OSSLT.
- A larger percentage of students successfully completed the OSSLT than last year.
- There were higher success rates in writing than in reading. This was also true of ESL/ELD learners and students with special needs. This pattern is similar to that observed among first-time eligible students.
- Seven percent were reported as enrolled in the OSSLC, which was offered for the first time in the 2003–2004 school year (Method 1).
- Only 3% of ESL/ELD learners were enrolled in the OSSLC, which was a smaller percentage than the other subgroups (6% of students with special needs, 7% of females and 7% of males).
- Of the ESL/ELD learners eligible to write, more than four-fifths participated this year. The participation of ESL/ELD learners increased by 19% from last year.
- Females and males did similarly well in reading, whereas females were more successful than males in writing.
- A large percentage (93%) of students reported having a computer at home; 30% of students reported using a computer almost every day for school work.
- Electronic communications and popular media were the materials that both genders reported reading most weeks.
- E-mail messages and chat-room conversations were the types of writing in which the largest percentage of students engaged most weeks.



Overall Recommendations

EQAO commends the work of the panels of education leaders from across the province who have devoted their expertise to the development of the significant and thoughtful Ontario Ministry of Education publications listed below. EQAO supports and encourages the use of

- *Think Literacy Success, Grades 7–12: The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario* (2003)
- *Building Pathways to Success, Grades 7–12: The Report of the Program Pathways for Students at Risk Work Group* (2003)
- *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7–12* (2003)
- *Preparing Students for the OSSLT: Best Practices from Ontario School Boards* (2003)

These publications provide recommendations and strategies for the improvement of English literacy. Such documents are highly relevant to student success on the OSSLT.

Another important reference is the *EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning* (2002).

EQAO recognizes that school boards, student-success leaders (at-risk initiatives), school principals and teachers have made literacy instruction a priority. Based on the October 2003 OSSLT achievement results; the patterns and trends emerging from the February 2002, October 2002 and October 2003 administrations of the OSSLT; the data collected from the Student Questionnaires and comments from the educator markers, EQAO recommends that **school boards, student-success leaders (at-risk initiatives), school principals and teachers** continue to do the following:

1. Planning and Using Information
   - Use information to support decision making and to leverage change
   - Gather and analyze data from a variety of sources, including provincial test scores, to set literacy goals and develop improvement plans at the board and school levels
   - Develop, implement and renew systematic kindergarten to Grade 12 improvement plans, especially for students at risk, that span subjects, grades and elementary and secondary panels

2. Building Capacity, Building Expertise
   - Provide professional development that supports educators by supplying them with current information on reading and writing research (e.g., journal summaries, abstracts and information on trends)
   - Provide training and resources for teaching cross-curricular reading and writing skills
   - Support innovative initiatives and effective practices to promote literacy in schools, particularly for students at risk

3. Targeting and Supporting Students at Risk

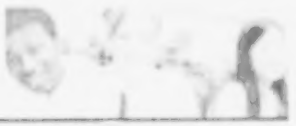
- Focus on
  - students at risk, as defined by *Think Literacy Success, Grades 7–12: The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario* (2003)
  - students who have been unsuccessful on the OSSLT
  - students enrolled in locally developed programs and ESL/ELD programs
  - students making the transition from elementary to secondary school who need additional support in acquiring reading and writing skills
  - applied level students who need specific remedial interventions
- Make use of the range of Ministry of Education supports available to Ontario secondary schools, including locally developed (essential) courses and the following curriculum courses: the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course, Learning Strategies, and Literacy Skills: Reading and Writing
- Use subject content and the classroom context to provide explicit literacy instruction that relates reading and writing skills to practical and purposeful situations and to daily life
- Review the accommodations being provided to students with special needs to ensure that the accommodations are appropriate to the student's needs, familiar to the student, used by the student on a regular basis for in-school assessment, and in the student's IEP

4. Implementing Technology

- Support access to and implementation of technology as a tool for developing reading, writing and research skills in the classroom
- Integrate traditional text forms with electronic forms of information and communication and popular media

5. Collaborating with Education and Community Partners

- Encourage board and school literacy committees and teachers across panels and subjects to share effective cross-curricular instructional practices and to engage in professional discourse as they analyze assessment data and plan adaptations to instruction that will improve students' reading and writing skills
- Collaborate with families, school councils and community partners, including workplace mentors, to develop projects to provide students with academic support services, "real life" contexts for the application of literacy skills, and access to communication technology, including the Internet, outside school



In recognition of the effective training in learning strategies and assessment practices they provide, EQAO recommends that **faculties of education**

- continue to assist pre-service teachers in gaining a thorough understanding of strategies for integrating literacy skills into subject-based curricula and of ways in which assessment, including large-scale assessment, informs instruction.

EQAO continues to collaborate with the **Ministry of Education**

- in using the accumulated OSSLT provincial assessment data along with other information to inform current curriculum initiatives for at-risk students.

Strategies for Instruction

The OSSLT is aligned with the expectations that require reading and writing skills in all subjects, in *The Ontario Curriculum* up to the end of Grade 9. The data from the OSSLT provide an additional link to practices recommended in *Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches*.

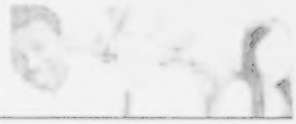
Based on the data from the October 2003 OSSLT, EQAO has developed the following specific suggestions for instruction.

EQAO suggests that, *because*

- *students have been more successful on the writing component than on the reading component of all three administrations (84% passed writing and 80% passed reading in February 2002; 85% passed writing and 76% passed reading in October 2002; and 85% passed writing and 82% passed reading in October 2003),* **teachers** in all subject areas encourage students to develop their vocabulary, practise determining meaning from context, identify main ideas and learn to identify organizational patterns in texts.
- *only 35% of first-time eligible students indicated that they read more than three hours a week outside school,* **principals, teachers and parents** collaborate to identify approaches that will encourage students to read a variety of materials for school, leisure and life-related purposes.
- *only 31% of first-time eligible students indicated that they use a computer almost every day for school work, while 97% indicated they have a computer at home,* **teachers and parents** collaborate to encourage students to use word processing and online resources for school work at home.
- *students have the most difficulty in passing reading,* **teachers** of all subjects focus on developing subject-specific vocabulary, using tools such as word walls, subject-specific crosswords, personal glossaries, word banks, concept maps and online and print dictionaries, and strategies such as examining context to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words, decoding unfamiliar expressions by reading past then going back and guessing, visualizing words divided into syllables and considering roots, prefixes and suffixes.

EQAO suggests that principals, teachers and parents collaborate to identify approaches that will encourage students to read a variety of materials for school, leisure and life-related purposes.

- *informational selections presented the greatest challenge for all students,* **teachers** of all subjects emphasize identifying the main idea, distinguishing fact from opinion, drawing conclusions and recognizing sequencing patterns such as cause and effect in expository texts.
- *a large proportion of students offered irrelevant, off-topic and off-task responses to the writing tasks,* **teachers** emphasize the importance of writing in the correct form and reading topics carefully.
- *a large proportion of students did not respond to the summary task;* **teachers** increase instructional attention on building the ability to write summaries with confidence.
- *the difference between students who were successful at writing the summary and those who were not appears to be the ability to identify the main idea of a text,* **teachers** of all subjects focus their instruction on assisting students to identify the main idea in a variety of types of text.
- *the difference between students who were successful at writing the opinion piece and those who were not seems to be the ability to choose one side of an issue, to provide a sufficient number of supporting details and to organize them coherently,* **teachers** provide opportunities for students to write opinion pieces using graphic organizers for prewriting and linking ideas with transitional words and phrases.
- *the difference between students who were successful at writing the information paragraph and those who were not seems to be the ability to identify a main idea, to select relevant details and to present them in an organized paragraph,* **teachers** encourage students to categorize information according to its relationship to a common main idea and to express the main idea and supporting details in a coherent, well-structured paragraph.
- *a large number of markers were concerned about the students' spelling and syntax,* **teachers** of all subjects encourage their students to spell accurately and to use proper syntax.



Appendix A

Sample Reading Selection with Items and Answers

This section provides a sample reading selection and items to support remediation for unsuccessful students. The sample should be used in conjunction with the information on the Individual Student Report. This section lists the reading skills assessed, the correct answer for each item, the percentage of students in the province who answered each item correctly and the percentage of students whose answers were partly correct (where applicable).

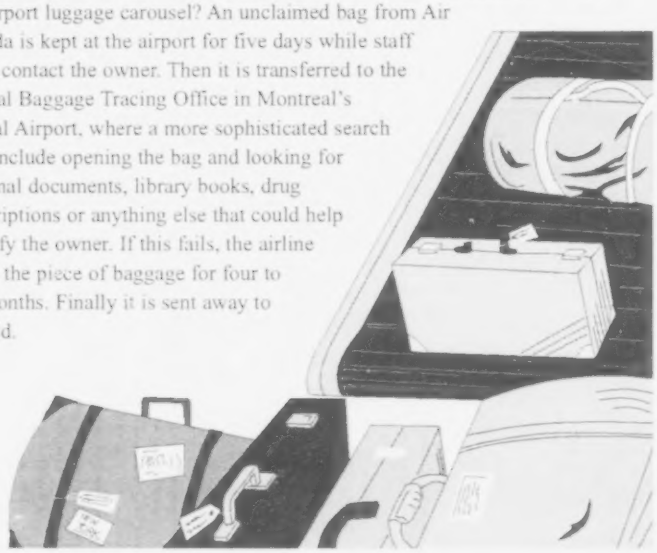
The answers are unedited student responses.

Reading 3

Tracking the Path of Lost Baggage

For air travellers, the problem of lost luggage occurs much less frequently today than it did a few decades ago. Then, it was not unusual for passengers to arrive in London and discover that their luggage had taken a different route, to Paris, Hawaii or Rome. Airlines are now much better than they used to be at uniting passengers with their baggage. For example, Air Canada carries 33 million pieces of baggage each year and only about 600 of these fail to reach their owners. Moreover, 95 percent of all claims for lost luggage are resolved within 24 hours. Air Canada and 350 airlines around the world are now using barcoded luggage tags and a computerized tracking system that can locate bags better than the most dedicated human employee. When an airline uses this system to match passenger claims with unclaimed luggage, the computers automatically search the databases of all the other airlines. 1

What happens to that lost suitcase that is found riding around on the airport luggage carousel? An unclaimed bag from Air Canada is kept at the airport for five days while staff try to contact the owner. Then it is transferred to the Central Baggage Tracing Office in Montreal's Dorval Airport, where a more sophisticated search may include opening the bag and looking for personal documents, library books, drug prescriptions or anything else that could help identify the owner. If this fails, the airline keeps the piece of baggage for four to six months. Finally it is sent away to be sold. 2



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3 One of the best-kept shopping secrets in Canada is the Unclaimed Luggage and Goods Store in Ottawa, where keen bargain hunters may purchase luggage or other articles left on the planes of many international airlines. Many unchecked items found on airplanes — eyeglasses, coats, books and umbrellas — are donated to charity. The rest are sold. Among the items that have been sold at the Ottawa store are a $10 000 solid gold Bulgari pen and a hand-crafted mandolin left by some unknown musician. In the American lost-luggage store in Scottsboro, Alabama, a 5.75-carat diamond was discovered in the toe of a sock, and one lucky woman bought a bag that had $2000 tucked in a side pocket.

4 To keep your bags from going astray, experts suggest a few simple actions. Put a red ribbon, an adhesive colour strip or a colourful sticker on the outside of your luggage to distinguish it from similar bags. This makes it much easier for you to spot your own bag on the luggage carousel and helps prevent other travellers from picking up your bag by mistake. In addition, you should place a card or label with your full name and address on the inside of your luggage. If the bag is lost, airline employees will be able to open and return it. A little prevention can ensure that your bag doesn't end up at the lost-luggage store.

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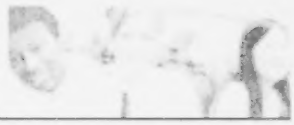
Multiple-Choice Questions

Assessing the students' understanding of indirectly stated ideas and information

	Provincial Percentage Correct
What is the best meaning for "sophisticated" as used in paragraph 2? F) quick G) classic H) mature J) thorough CORRECT ANSWER: J	77%
Why are the dashes used in paragraph 3? A) to add a new idea C) to emphasize an important idea B) to make a personal comment D) to begin and end a list of examples CORRECT ANSWER: D	88%
Which of the following best describes the key idea linking the first and last paragraphs? F) tracking luggage electronically H) putting an identifying mark on your luggage G) connecting passengers and their luggage J) selling the contents of travellers' lost luggage CORRECT ANSWER: G	69%



*Written Answer Questions**

	Provincial Percentage Correct	Provincial Percentage Partly Correct
Assessing the students' understanding of directly stated ideas and information		
Name one item that has been sold at the Unclaimed Luggage and Goods Store in Ottawa. (paragraph 3)		
Correct answer indicates luggage, a Bulgari pen or the mandolin.	80%	
In paragraph 4, what word or words are used to connect two related sentences?		
Correct answer indicates one of "in addition" or "This."	72%	
Assessing the students' understanding of indirectly stated ideas and information		
Why does Air Canada sell unclaimed luggage after four to six months?		
Correct answer gives a plausible, specific reason for Air Canada's policy. Acceptable answers include: • *They sell it because no one has claimed for it between this time.* • *There is no contact with the owner after many attemps to connects the luggage with the owner so they decide to make a profit or help others profit.*	91%	
Assessing the students' ability to make connections between personal experiences and the ideas and information in the reading selection		
Explain how "Moreover" connects the ideas in sentence 5 in paragraph 1 with the previous sentence.		
Correct answer indicates that "moreover" means there is additional specific information about the lost luggage.	35%	
Partly correct answer indicates general comprehension but may omit an explanation or specific details. Acceptable answers include: • *because its still talking about the same thing in the next sentence* • *It connects two facts together.*		35%

* Student samples have not had their errors corrected.

	Provincial Percentage Correct	Provincial Percentage Partly Correct
Why would some "unchecked items found on airplanes" be donated to charity rather than sold?		
Correct answer gives a plausible, specific reason for the donation.	71%	
Acceptable answers include: • *they are very common and not worth alot and coult be used for children.* • *They are things that charities would normally ask people to donate.* • *Eyeglasses, coats, books and umbrellas can be donated to charity rather then sold because they're not worth that much and they're unchecked.* • *This is because the price would be less because it's old and used and not enough money could be made.*		
Partly correct answer indicates general comprehension but omits a needed explanation.		16%
Based on your reading of this selection, explain whether airline companies are doing enough to prevent lost luggage?		
Correct answer is a judgment about the effectiveness of airline procedures for preventing loss of luggage. It is supported by a specific and plausible reason.	62%	
Acceptable answers include: • *Yes. Not only do they have bar codes for luggage and a tracking system, they also tell passengers what to do for their own luggage.* • *yes they are doing this 95% is found.*		

Appendix B

Sample of a Writing Task and Sample Student Responses

This section provides a sample of one of the four writing tasks on the OSSLT, to support remediation for unsuccessful students. It should be used in conjunction with the information on the Individual Student Report.

The samples of student responses for Columns 2 and 3 are unedited. The rubric on page 49 describes the columns. Work in Column 3 is acceptable writing for the task; work in Column 2 approaches acceptable writing for the task. Provincially, 56% of the student performances on this task were in Column 3, and 8% of student performances were in Column 2.

Task:	Write a **series of paragraphs** (a minimum of three) expressing an opinion on the topic below. Develop your main idea with supporting details (proof, facts, examples, etc.).
Purpose and Audience:	an adult who is interested in your opinion
Topic:	**Should Canada Join the United States?**
Length:	The lined space provided for your written work indicates the approximate length of the writing expected.

Three lined pages were provided for the student's response.

Opinion: Student Sample #1

Should Canada join the United States? No. I think that Canada shouldn't join the United States because we are our own country and most people like it that way.

Canada is the land of freedom of speech, and canada is a free country. the United States isnt.

In the United States there is alot of comotion and there are way too many problems and I dont think that the people of Canada wouldnt like for both of these countrys joined together!

Holistic Score and Rationale

Column 2 (see Rubric on page 47)

An opinion is clearly expressed: *"No. I think that Canada shouldn't join the United States...."*

The response does not include sufficient supporting details. Details are not developed.

There are lapses in organization. The details that are provided are not linked to the opinion expressed. No conclusion is provided.

Errors in spelling, *"alot of comotion"*, *"countrys"*, and in apostrophe use, *"isnt"*, *"dont"*, are present but do not interfere with communication.

Opinion: Student Sample #2

Canada should join the united states and form one large country. It would be good because we would have more power, and our country would be much richer.

IF Canada joined the united states the country that we would make would have alot of power. It would be very good because we would have large amys and alot of people living in our country. Therefore it would be very unlikly that wars would occur because of the amount of people we have. And if such a time come that we need to have a war we would be able to win easily because of the amount of soldiers we have. Power would be a major benefit if Canada joined America.

IF Canada joined America we would be a much richer country. Since Canadian money is worth less the American if we joined them we would all be earning the same amount of money. We would also have an extreamly large country , with a wide range of resources that we could use. Also if we were joined as one maybe we would have more peace instead of being seperate countrys and fighting. We could join as one, and be peaceful. If it worked out between Canada and the USA, maybe other countries would follow in our footsteps and begin to join and come together, rather then breaking up and being indepentant. Canada joining America has many benifits. It would be a good decision to make it become a reality.

Holistic Score and Rationale

Column 3 (see Rubric on page 47)

A clear statement of opinion is expressed: *"Canada should join the united states and form one large country."*

Sufficient supporting details are well developed around three key ideas: *"...more power..."*, *"...much richer...."* and *"more peace"*.

The organization is simple, with links from the opening paragraph to the body. Each key idea is developed in the two paragraphs of the body, which begin with a parallel opening: *"IF Canada joined the united states we would be..."* and *"IF Canada joined America we would be...."* There is also a conclusion that links to the statement of opinion: *"Canada joining America has many benifits. It would be a good decision to make it become a reality."*

There are errors, but they do not interfere with communication: *"extreamly"*, *"benifits"*.

Rubric

Series of Paragraphs Expressing an Opinion

Blank	Illegible	Irrelevant Content	Off Topic	Off Task	Fewer Than Three Paragraphs	At Least Three Paragraphs
nothing written or drawn in the lined space provided	cannot be read; completely crossed out/erased; not written in English	does not attempt assigned prompt (e.g., comment on the task, drawings, "?", "!", "I don't know")	not related to prompt	no opinion or opinion not expressed in expository form (e.g., personal story, dialogue)	opinion expressed in fewer than three paragraphs	opinion expressed in a minimum of three paragraphs

"At least three paragraphs" leads to this rubric:

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4
1A an unsupported opinion AND / OR 1B errors prevent clear communication	a series of paragraphs expressing an unclear opinion with insufficient supporting details and lapses in organization errors interfere with communication	a series of paragraphs expressing a clear opinion with sufficient supporting details organized in a simple or mechanical manner errors do not interfere with communication	a coherently organized series of paragraphs expressing a clear opinion developed with sufficient and relevant supporting details errors, if any, do not interfere with communication

"Fewer than three paragraphs" leads to this rubric:

Column A	Column B	Column C
AA an unsupported opinion AND / OR AB errors prevent clear communication	an unclear opinion with insufficient supporting details and lapses in organization errors interfere with communication	a clear opinion with sufficient supporting details presented in an organized manner errors do not interfere with communication

Explanation of Terms and Categories

First-Time Eligible students typically entered Grade 9 during the 2002–2003 school year. These students (and any others who were placed in this cohort) were required to write the OSSLT for the first time in October 2003.

Total First-Time Eligible includes all students in the first-time eligible cohort who are working toward an OSSD. This category includes all participating students as well as those deferred or absent.

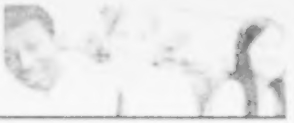
Previously Eligible students entered Grade 9 during the 2000–2001 (cohort one) or the 2001-2002 (cohort two) school year. Cohort one students (and any others who were placed in this cohort) were required to write the OSSLT for the first time in February 2002. Cohort two students (and any others who were placed in this cohort) were required to write the OSSLT for the first time in October 2002. Students who were not successful in February 2002 and/or in October 2003, or were absent or deferred became eligible again to write the OSSLT in October 2003.

Total Previously Eligible includes all students in the previously eligible cohort who are working toward an OSSD. This category includes all participating students as well as those deferred, absent or fulfilling their OSSD requirement through the OSSLC.

Schools are responsible for indicating which component(s) the student still requires in order to complete the OSSLT successfully. Previously eligible students are reported in one of the three following subcategories:

- Required to Pass Reading and Writing
- Required to Pass Reading Only
- Required to Pass Writing Only

First-time eligible and previously eligible students are reported separately to allow schools to compare the performance of first-time eligible students from year to year. These comparisons will assist schools in assessing the effectiveness of their literacy programs.



Successfully Completed the OSSLT	Students participated in the OSSLT and passed both the reading component and the writing component.
Wrote the OSSLT But Were Not Successful	Students participated fully in the OSSLT but did not pass the reading component or the writing component, or were unsuccessful on both components.
Number Fully Participating in the OSSLT	Students are designated as having fully participated if they were present on both days of the administration. A student is considered to be present for a day's testing if there was work completed in at least one of the two booklets administered on a given day.
Absent One or Both Days	Students are considered absent from the test if there was no work completed in the two booklets administered to them on one or both days of the administration.
Deferred	Students' participation in the OSSLT can be deferred under several circumstances, as outlined in EQAO's *Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals and Exemptions*. A student is categorized as deferred only if the Student Information Form (SIF) indicates a deferral and there is no work in any of the student's test booklets. If a student completed any portion of the OSSLT, he or she is not categorized as deferred.
Fulfilling Requirement Through OSSLC	According to Ministry of Education guidelines, students who have been eligible to write the OSSLT at least twice and who have been unsuccessful at least once are eligible to take the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC). Note that if a student completed any portion of the OSSLT, he or she is not categorized as fulfilling the requirement through the OSSLC.
Exempted	Students can be exempted from the OSSLT only if they are not working toward an OSSD. A student is categorized as exempted only if his or her SIF indicates that the student is exempted, and there is no work in any of his or her test booklets. Note that if a student completed any portion of the OSSLT, he or she is not categorized as exempted.
ESL/ELD	"English as a second language (ESL)/English Literacy Development (ELD)" designates students identified by the school as ESL/ELD learners

Students Receiving Special Provisions

ESL and ELD learners are eligible to receive special provisions. These are changes in setting of the test (e.g., individual study carrel, individual or small-group setting) and in timing (additional time, or more than double the time with EQAO approval) and/or periodic supervised breaks.

Students with Special Needs

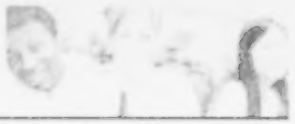
Students with special needs are students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), who may or may not have been identified as "exceptional pupils" by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC), and who are receiving special education programs and services (Ministry of Education Policy/Program Memorandum No. 127). Results of students with special needs always exclude students designated as gifted.

Students Receiving Accommodations

Students receiving accommodations are students with an IEP who may or may not have been identified as "exceptional pupils" by an IPRC. Detailed information about accommodations is available in the Ministry of Education Policy/Program Memorandum No. 127 and in the *EQAO Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals and Exemptions.*

Note that EQAO's *Guide for Accommodations, Special Provisions, Deferrals and Exemptions* describes various types of accommodation, grouped under the following four broad categories:

1. Setting for the test (e.g., an individual or small-group setting or an individual study carrel, preferential seating within the regular classroom, assistive devices or adaptive equipment, and/or prompts to draw the student's attention back to the test)
2. Timing (e.g., additional time to a maximum of double the time allotted or more than double the time allotted, and/or periodic supervised breaks)
3. Presentation format (e.g., sign language or an oral interpreter, Braille version, large-print version, coloured-paper version, large-print and coloured paper version, audio version, verbatim reading of writing prompts and accompanying texts, and/or assistive devices and technology resources)



4. Response format (e.g., use of computer or word processor for responses, audiotaping of responses, assistive devices and technology resources, videotaping of responses, and/or verbatim scribing of responses)

Method 1

This method provides a percentage breakdown of all students in the cohort who were working toward an OSSD. The only students excluded from the percentages in Method 1 are exempted students who were not working toward an OSSD and were therefore exempted.

Method 2

This method provides a percentage breakdown of those students who fully participated in the OSSLT. Students are considered to have fully participated if they were present on both days of the administration.

Academic Program

Academic courses focus on the essential concepts of the discipline and also explore related concepts. Academic courses develop students' knowledge and skills by emphasizing theoretical, abstract applications of the essential concepts and incorporating practical applications as appropriate (taken from the Ministry of Education document *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements* [1999]).

Applied Program

Applied courses also focus on the essential concepts of the discipline, but develop students' knowledge and skills by emphasizing practical, concrete applications of these concepts and incorporating theoretical applications as appropriate. Academic and applied courses differ in the balance between essential concepts and additional material, and in the balance between theory and application (taken from the Ministry of Education document *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements* [1999]).

Locally Developed Program

Locally developed courses are courses that are not described in a Ministry of Education curriculum policy document. If offered for credit, such a course requires the approval of the responsible supervisory official in the school board and, when approved, must be submitted to the Ministry of Education and Training for Ministry of Education approval (taken from the Ministry of Education document *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements* [1999]).

Notes

1. Method 1 provides a percentage breakdown of all students in the cohort who were working toward an OSSD. The only students excluded from the Method 1 percentages are those who were not working toward an OSSD and who were therefore exempted.

2. Throughout this report, percentages in the charts may not add up to 100%, due to rounding.

3. Method 2 provides a percentage breakdown of those students who fully participated in the OSSLT. Students are considered to have fully participated if they were present on both days of the administration.

4. First-time eligible students entered Grade 9 during the 2002–2003 school year. These students (and others who were placed in this cohort) were required to write the OSSLT for the first time in October 2003.

5, 6, 7, 10, 17, 18, 21. These data are based on information recorded by the school on the Student Information Form.

8, 9, 19, 20. These data are based on information derived from the Student Questionnaire, which was completed by the students.

11, 14, 15. The 1% difference between this percentage and the percentage obtained by adding the percentages in the table above (i.e., the percentage passing writing only and the percentage passing both reading and writing) is attributable to double rounding effects associated with adding the percentages.

12, 13. The 1% difference between this percentage and the percentage obtained by adding the percentages in the table above (i.e., the percentage passing reading only and the percentage passing both reading and writing) is attributable to double rounding effects associated with adding the percentages.

16. Previously eligible students entered Grade 9 during the 2000–2001 or 2001–2002 school year. These students (and others who were placed in this cohort) were required to write the OSSLT for the first time in February 2002 or October 2002. Students who were not successful in February 2002 or October 2002 or who were absent or deferred became eligible again to write the OSSLT in October 2003. Student status is based on information recorded by schools on the Student Information Form.

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